
MORE
Teen-Age
FOOTBALL
STORIES

Edited by
JOSH FURMAN

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Major Effort

by JACK RITCHIE

THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM announced that the paid attendance was 53,216 and I wasn't going to argue with that. There didn't seem to be any empty seats at all, not even high up in the stands behind the goal posts.

53,216 people and just about every one of them a stranger.

I mean I come from a small town. Back home, when I was in highschool, I could go onto the football field, look at the stands, and know just about everybody there. Everybody from our town, anyway.

Mom and Dad made a point of being there on the fifty yard line. Especially Dad. He never missed a game. And maybe even my sister, if she got a date who liked to watch football.

Until I came to the university, I never saw more than three thousand people at one time and that was when Jefferson High played for the regional championship.

I was nervous then, too, but nothing at all like today. Here I was, on the sidelines, walking back and forth to keep warm, and waiting to get out there.

Out on the field, Hesselman barked out the signals and faded back behind the line.

This time there was no blitz and he had time to look for his man. Jennings was out in the open, streaking downfield, two steps behind the man assigned to cover him. Hesselman cocked his arm and threw another long one.

It was a perfect pass, floating down toward Jennings' outstretched arms, but once again it slipped through his fingers. Jennings fell to the ground, pounding the hard turf in frustration.

That made the record only three completions in thirteen attempts and Jennings had muffed five of the passes.

I watched Coach Brewer in front of the bench talking to one of his assistants. Would he take Jennings out?

You really couldn't blame Jennings, I thought. It was just too cold out there today. Only a degree or two above freezing. Not really football weather. Your fingers get stiff and you have trouble holding on to things.

Jennings stayed in.

I tightened my chin strap and double-timed in place for half a minute to keep my legs warm. But mainly I worried about my hands. If a ball hawk like Jennings was having a bad day, it must be rough out there.

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The cheer leaders in front of the Ohio stands went into their acrobatic routines to draw some encouragement for their team from the fans. The cheering section flashed its cards—first a diagonal *FIGHT*, and then the cards turned and we got a big O.

Everybody wants to get into the act, I thought.

I felt the tenseness taking hold again, but I knew that I was as ready today as I ever would be.

And I was good. I knew that.

I watched a couple of substitutes throw off their blankets and trot out onto the field.

You don't get to be good by wishing for it. You aren't born that way. You got to keep working and waiting for your chance. But sometimes you forget that.

I smiled a little as I thought back.

I left highschool figuring that I was something special. When I stepped off the bus at the university, I had the idea that everybody was just marking time and waiting for me to show up.

It didn't take me long to discover that I was just another freshman among a lot of other freshmen who were also big wheels back home.

My eyes went to the players on the field.

Fourth down and three to go. We had the ball on

Ohio's seventeen yard line and the score still stood at nothing to nothing.

I looked at Coach Brewer. This was the time to try for the field goal.

But Coach Brewer had his own ideas on how to play the game. He decided to let them try for the first down.

I shook my head and kicked a scrap of paper away from the sidelines.

The quarterback took the ball from center and shoved it into the hands of Schmidt. The big fullback rammed into the line. He picked up a yard, but that wasn't enough. The ball changed sides.

It took a lot of work to be here today. Hard work. A lot more than just showing up on the field on autumn afternoons. The practice went on day after day. Even in summer you couldn't allow yourself to get stale and out of condition.

Back home in the evenings after supper, Dad and I would go out into our big back yard and Dad would coach me.

He was pretty good himself when he went to highschool. If he'd gone on to college he might have become one of the great ones.

On the field, Ohio's right half took the hand-off on

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Major Effort

a sweep. He got one nice block at the line and another as he cut back in at the forty-five.

And then suddenly he was away!

The stands roared as he sped along the sidelines, pursued by the last safety man.

The Ohio back was going to come almost close enough for me to touch—to tackle!

I smiled and quickly stepped back. That would really put my name in the papers, now wouldn't it?

I watched him pull up in the end zone to make the score six to nothing in Ohio's favor.

The teams lined up for the try for the extra point.

The ball was snapped back and held. The kicker swung his leg and the ball went squarely over the crossbar for the extra point.

It looked so smooth and easy from here, I thought. How many people realized how much practice it took to make it look that way?

The teams lined up again for the kick-off and behind them breath vapor steamed from the spectators in the stands.

Yes, I was good, I thought. But even knowing that didn't prevent me from worrying. When I finally got on the field, would I muff a signal? Would my hands become so numb with the cold that I'd mess up something?

More Teen-Age Football Stories

My eyes went to the scoreboard clock and my stomach tightened.

Six seconds . . . five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one.

The gun officially ended the half.

The teams poured off the field and now I thought the eyes turned to me. All 53,216 pairs of them.

I checked the chin strap of my shako again and looked behind me.

They were all waiting, ready with their instruments.

I blew my whistle.

And then strutting high and in full control of my baton, I led the university band onto the football field for the half-time ceremonies.

Everything worked out just fine.

The

by J.